

CLIMATE CHANGE, A THREAT TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THEATRE TO THE RESCUE

By

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Abstract

This paper observes that the phenomenon of Climate Change, which has left devastating blows on the cultural development of African people is occasioned by mans' incessant quests for modernity as opposed to his adherence to the indigenous cultural practices. Consequently, this paper presents theatre as a potent mechanism that is capable of reducing the negative consequences of the phenomenon of climate change, which has elicited very serious concerns among environmental experts and the enlightened people of this continent. The study employs the pragmatic theoretical approach, using 'Theatre for Development' (TFD) methodology. The objective of the work is to showcase theatre as an effective tool, an Alternative Development Medium (ADM) that can provide ameliorative avenue that will reduce the effects of climate change for the sustenance of cultural development in Africa. Arising from the above, this paper concludes that theatre, using the Theatre for Development (TFD) approach is an effective device for solving all societal problems.

Introduction

When experts alerted the world about Climate Change and its attendant effects on the cultural development of the people of African, not many people (particularly, the average man on the street and including some urban dwellers), understood what climate change is all about, neither did they understand the causes of the phenomenon. It then became clear that ignorance was the bane, occasioned by inadequate dissemination of information. Aside from the cultural crime that Africans is said to have committed; substituting indigenous knowledge for modernity, she is also guilty of neglect. Toman (2006:90) observes that: "For Centuries, cultural heritage has not only suffered from different forms of manmade emergency situations and from natural disasters, but also simply from negligence."

Apparently, what our experts needed to do, which possibly they have neglected, which brought the consequences that are associated with climate change, is, perhaps, to begin a process of educating the society about the phenomenon, the causes, consequences and ways of ameliorating the effect. This

we opined should be a cultural approach. In this direction, steps retracing process, pragmatic ones for that matter that will not undermine the cultural heritage of the people, becomes apt; a return to the use of traditional methods, which have been the unique ways through which Africans do things. Only then will the effect of climate change that is denying us of cultural development can be minimised, in the event that an outright eradication is impossible in the immediately.

In charting this noble cause, theatre came top on the lists of cultural mechanism for addressing the problem. This is due the fact that from time immemorial theatre has in addition to entertaining has been used as a mechanism for addressing various communal problems as part and parcel of the ways of life of the African people and the people of the world.

In this paper therefore, we shall attempt a brief overview of the phenomenon called climate change and its effect on cultural development. We will also explore the notion of theatre, the relationships between culture and theatre. Thereafter, we shall take a cursory look at Theatre for Development (TFD), as an Alternative Development Medium (ADM) in addressing the threat of climate change for the sustenance of cultural development in Africa.

Climate Change and Culture

Climate change variously described by scientific researchers, scholars and environmental experts is an: "increase in average global temperature" (Lee, 2010)¹, "a measurable increase in the average temperature of the earth atmosphere, oceans, rivers and landmasses" (Acheampong, 2010)², "Natural events and human activities believed to be contributing to an increase in average global temperatures...caused primarily by increases in "greenhouse" gases such as Carbon Dioxide (CO₂)." (Shah, 2010).³ It is also interchangeably referred to as "Global Warming", which also connotes "measurable increase in the temperature of the earth atmosphere." This means that climate change phenomena have been an occurrence on the planet earth for quite some-time now.

Culture, on the other hand, even though it has been referred to by many scholars and theorists as a complex concept, viewed from the perception of people of different ethnic and ideological diversity. For instance, culture to social scientists is a people's whole way of life; conversation, mode of dressing and activity in such fields as art, literature, and music. Edward B. Tylor (1871), a revered English Anthropologist, in his book, *Primitive Culture*, refers to culture as a complex phenomenon and posits that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor, 1832-1917 Encarta

1998) Kartha defines culture as “an integral part of every society...a learned pattern of behaviour and ways in which a person lives his or her life. Culture is essential for the existence of a society, because it binds people together.” (Kartha, 2010)⁴ However, the UNESCO definition of Culture cited in the works of Dogbe (2009) which defines culture as “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterised society or social groups”. (Dogbe, 2009: 101) seems to capture holistically what culture stands for. Atongi (2009) summary of what culture is all about is also apt. this he describe as: “the human values emanating from ...personal interaction throughout history. (Atongi, 2009:162) Therefore culture is the totality of mans ways of life.

A critical study of culture and climate shows that climate is an umbrella under which man exists. As such, at different times man will witness different climatic conditions; hot, cold and perhaps warm climate. That in essence means that it is man who must continually adjust to the climate changes, which unfortunately are so unfriendly nowadays. Under this circumstance, man must learn to confront and cope with the problems that climate change is bringing to him. This is the concern that we intend to address in this paper.

There is no doubting the fact that if man must continue to live in his environment; he must be prepared to embark on actions that will buy for him an environmental friendly atmosphere, principal of which will be the continual protection of his cultural heritage. In this wise man must be ready to purge his environment of alien technology, which unfortunately we patronise so recklessly and lust for non-indigenous things that the environment abhors. Although technology from all intent and purposes is suppose to improve man's well-being, but more often than not the reverse is the case. It therefore becomes expedient to shun alien technology and combat headlong climate change for the sustenance of our cultural heritage.

Historical overview of the origin of Climate Change

The historical antecedents of man; his creation, his environment, his existence and activities shows that the phenomenon called Climate change is not a recent phenomenon; it was witnessed shortly after the creation; when God, the creator's obsession to cleanse the earth of evils, which got to an unimaginable level, became a necessity. “And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven” (Genesis 6: 17 The Bible (KJV) 1994:9). Another was witnessed in Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19: 24 where it reports that: “Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven.” (The Bible (KJV) 1994:25) The two incidences cited above, though from the

religious perspective, shows that climate change occurrence has always been as a result of man's overbearing activities on his environment. On each occasion the Lord had to employ the supernatural phenomenon of climate to restore sanity.

Comparatively, climate change in our contemporary we can decipher some similarity; man's activities in his environment giving rise to atmospheric global temperature, which has been noted to manifests as: Tropospheric temperature, humidity, temperature over oceans, sea surface temperature, ocean heat content, temperature over land gases, are said to be caused mainly by burning of fossil fuels, coal, oil, and natural gas (green house gases CO₂ in the atmosphere) and deforestation. This indicated that the inhabitants on the planet; the earth, uses lots of mechanically driven and fuel consuming equipment, such as motor vehicles, industrial machines and they all emit Carbon-dioxide (CO₂). It is also clear that man engages in a lot of brutal cutting down of trees (deforestation) without making efforts to replace them and also in lots of bush burning.

Culture and Climate Change: A review of related Literature.

Climate change from all indications has left no palatable tale on the lips of everyone. Sadly, the environment and its inhabitants are most vulnerable to the consequences of the phenomenon. Commendably the World Bank, is one of the corporate bodies that have shown serious concerned about the issue of climate change and which have actually initiated several rigorous efforts towards combating the threat. One of such efforts was the conference it organised in 2009. In its report tagged 'World Development Report 2010' released after the conference the issue of climate change was one of the major issues discussed. The conference observed that "Attaining the Millennium Development Goals and ensuring a safe and sustainable future beyond 2015 become more difficult as the planet warms, rainfall patterns shift, and climate-related natural disasters become more frequent." (WDR 2010)⁵

As a universal remedy, the conference advises that "The world must act now, act together, and act differently, before costs go up and avoidable hardships are needlessly endured by poor and vulnerable people." (WDR 2010)

It became evidenced that several efforts have been mounted to reduce the impact of the effect of the phenomenon of climate change in our environment. We noted this in the contributions of eminent concerned scholars who offered various suggestions on how the world could go about ameliorating the effect of the occurrence. One of such scholars is Oloyede (2009) in his text of Goodwill message delivered on the occasion of the formal opening Ceremony of the First UCC-Unilorin joint conference on 28th September, 2009, he emphasise on the

need to address the issue of culture. He reiterates that: "Our survival as Africans lies in resuscitating our dying cultural values, lying comatose as a result of the onslaught of domineering Western culture and our active connivance or fascination with the marauding pop-culture. (Oloyede, 2009:2-3)

If we critically analyse the advice above, one will discover that it stresses on the need for African to go back to her cultural roots; in our practices, ethics and traditions. In the same vein, Amilcar (1973) cited in the works of (Mlama, 1991:15) stressed on the need for us to resuscitate our communal relationship. He observed that:

Man has never shown as much interest in knowing other men and other societies as during the century of imperialist domination. An unprecedented mass of information, of hypothesis and theory has been built up, notably in the field of history, ethnology, ethnography, sociology and culture concerning peoples or groups brought under imperialist domination.

The above underscores the degree of departure from our communal practice, which was a departure from African system of coexisting.

Giving the above observation, it became clear that the only way by which we can have our cultural heritage, values and dignity restored is to retrace our steps culturally; return to our cultural/indigenous practices and jettison our obsession for modern technological. We should adjust what we eat, the type of vehicles we drive; possibly revert back to the olden days mode of transportation (chariots, donkeys horses etc), watch how we build our houses, invent solar power, which will bring about low or zero electricity consumption etc.

If we do these, we will be relishing in the statement of hope espoused by the World Bank that:

Lives and livelihoods can be preserved and improved if we act immediately and collaboratively to protect past gains; ensure that future development is climate-resilient; help people to adapt to new weather patterns and cope with extreme events; find new economic opportunities in a changing climate; and work toward meeting energy needs sustainably. (WDR 2010)

Observing in the same direction, Rossler (2006:82) reminds us that our culture can never be separated from our environment. He submits that: "The character of cultural heritage is closely related to climate. Cultural landscapes

evolved in close interaction with people and their environments.” Therefore, it is man who must devise a means of allowing peace to permeate in his environment. Apparently, Rossler’s (2006: 83) observation that: “many cultural properties on the world heritage list are ‘living’ places dependent on their communities for sustenance and maintenance” confirms this. It then became obvious that the theatre, using Theatre for Development (TfD) methodological approach will be a potent mechanism for buying peace for his environment. This therefore explains why it is germane that we elucidate on the relationship between Culture and Theatre.

Culture and Theatre

Theatre and culture have been observed to be two entwined concepts that operate complementarily. While Culture is described as the ways of life the people of a given entity, theatre according to Kidd (1983:267) is “an organic part of life of a community rather than an aesthetic commodity.”

Taylor’s description of culture as a complex phenomenon is based on cultural diversities such as mode of dressing, mode of eating and types of food, how status is addressed, sexual division of labour, how children are raised, classification of relationship etc. However, Mlama’s (1991: 10) definition of Culture as: “a reflection and determination of the working of a society’s structures”, which we subscribe to aptly describe culture.

Theatre, on the other hand, is referred to by Brockett (1996:9), as a medium that “should entertain”, by Etherton (1982:19) as “the circumstance of a live dramatic performance”, by Wilson (2007:4and 6) as an art that “mirrors or reflects life...concentrates on human concerns.” Kidd’s (1983:267and 269) variously describes the theatre as “an organic part of the life of a community rather than an ‘aesthetic commodity’ ... source of identity- a means of strengthening the spirit as a pre-condition for survival and self defence.” Kidd’s description aptly captures the essence of theatre in our society when view as a phenomenon that presents a caricature of our daily live activities and experiences on stage.

It is intriguing to note that theatre has functioned as therapeutics, weapon for conscientization, information dissemination and has in almost all cases found to excite radical transformation. Brook (1992) cited in (Brockett, 1996:19) confirms that: “Theatre do something that no politician can do – make a radical transformation so that for a moment the world is seen complete with all its difficulties, all its riches and all its potentialities.” Flowing from that, we should

by now begin to appreciate the relevance of theatre in addressing contemporary issues such as climate change.

Theoretical Framework

In pursuance of this research work, we decided to adopt the theory: "Pragmatism" as our theoretical framework. Pragmatism derived from Greek word '*Pragma*' meaning 'action' was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878 (James, 1906:1) which was variously defined as "a practical approach to problems and affairs", and a "practical function of knowledge as an instrument for adapting to reality and controlling it." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Britannica Encyclopaedia respectively)⁶. Also according to Hollinger (2009) "is a philosophical movement that has had a major impact on American culture from the late 19th century to the present." (Hollinger in Encarta DVD 2009) The theory among others emphasise that all ideas and theory should be tested by assessing whether acting upon them would produce the desirable or undesirable result.

Characteristically, pragmatists regard all theories as tentative hypothesis, which its approaches are aimed at improving the entire department, such as: Education or politics within the society. Three American philosophers were identified as the early exponents of this theory. They are: Charles S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey. Although each of them have divergent ideological perspective to the application of the theory of Pragmatism, but in the end, their maxims address one fundamental issue, which is; directing the right actions truthfully at resolving problems.

Peirce, cited in (Hollinger Encarta DVD 2009) posits that problem solving approach should be from the angle of scientific practical approach, hence he says: "Because human environment were becoming large and comprehension of reality was becoming greater, there is the need for assisting human scientifically."

His ideology based on 'logical positivism', embraces the importance of scientific verification and rejecting personal experience based on true knowledge. It is a contrast to our approach.

Dawey's approach, which tilts towards supporting Peirce's ideology disposition, where suggests that: "traditional ideas about knowledge, truth and values, in which absolute are assumed, are incompatible with a Darwinian worldview...must be discarded and review" (Dewey cited in Hollinger Encarta DVD 2009) also stand against our position because it suggested discarding traditional ideas about knowledge.

William's (1907: 42) ideology cited in the work of Hookway (2008), which posits that: "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite assignable reasons." (Hookway 2008 SEP)

We consider William's ideological disposition relevant to our standpoint and therefore adopted as our theoretical framework. The name of what proves to be good for addressing the problem of climate change is the theatre. Especially that William (in Hollinger, Encarta DVD 2009) further proposes that: "In the face of scientific civilisation, system of morality, religion and faith should be observed."

The three theorists' differences in ideological approaches notwithstanding, we observed that holistically their methods are based on solving problems when they arise as Hookway (2008:2584) summarises their approaches to suggest: "a return to common sense and the facts of experience and, thus, as rejecting a flawed philosophical heritage which had distorted the work of earlier thinkers."

It tandem with William pragmatic ideology, we choose 'theatre' using Tfd approach as that cultural mechanism for rescuing our society from the devastating effect of climate change for the cultural development of Africa.

Theatre for Development (TFD) approach as a mechanism for ameliorating the threat of Climate Change for Cultural Development

Without undermining efforts so far mounted by Ecological and environmental experts, without casting aspersion against the efforts so far made at both Governmental and Non-governmental agencies levels, which we observe are more of a prescriptive approach rather than being a curative one. Brockett (1996) seems to capture experts' and government disposition to serious issues by observing that: "Historians, philosophers, and scientists isolate a limited problem, do their research or experiments, and then set down their conclusion in logical, expository prose; they direct their appeal primarily to the intellect. (Brockett, 1996:13)

It is clear that scientifically based approaches seem to merely identify problems and prescribe solution rather than combat it headlong. This explains why we suggest the theatre as an alternative mechanism for combating the threat of climate change, using the Theatre for Development (Tfd) approach. This is because it is pragmatically proactive, it is quick, sharp and witty to appeal and arrest emotion. Brockett (1996) extol the virtues of the theatre as that mechanism

that: “seek to involve the audience’s emotions, imagination, and intellect directly” (Brockett, 1996:13)

‘Theatre for Development’, which different theatre scholars such as; Ross Kid, Chuck Mike, Augusto Boal etc. under different appellations such as: ‘Theatre of the oppressed’, ‘Gorilla Theatre’ ‘Popular Theatre’, ‘Theatre for Conscientisation’, etc. have been employed to combat different societal and communal problems. However, in this work, we adopt the appellation; ‘Theatre for Development (TfD)’ as a mechanism being suggested for combating climate change for the attainment of cultural development in Africa.

Abah (1996) defines Theatre for development as: “People’s theatre, addressing their own problems in their own language, using their own idioms and on their own terms.” (Abah, 1996: 247) However, Pentki’s (1998) definition cited in Yankah (2006) seems to capture our perception of Theatre for Development, which he describe as that “used in the service of development aims; a tool available to development agencies which pursue the goal of self-development and an improved quality of life of all people whose material conditions leave them vulnerable to hostile and predatory forces, both natural and human.” (Yankah, 2006: 42)

The above underscores TfD as a potent tool for addressing social, political, economic and even scientific issues, because, through peoples collective participation, changes manifest.

Operations of TFD

The operational mechanisms of Theatre for development takes various dimensions; ‘Theatre for the people’ style; in which case the researcher’s team provide all the theatrical components for the performance i.e. actors, costume, properties and the dialogue, or ‘Theatre with the people’ style; where the performers are made up of members of the researcher’s team and a few members of the targeted community or ‘Theatre by the people’; where the targeted community are the performers, they are only guided by the researcher’s team

The approach of Alec Dickson cited in the works of Gibbs (1999) in Banham et al edited work; *African Theatre in Development* to Theatre for Development excites us. It is therefore our operational approach for addressing the issue of climate change and cultural development in Africa. Dickson’s ideological standpoint suggest that researchers “Challenge those he is working with, to clarify issues, communicate information and recommend

solutions...Drama within the context of a national community development programme.” (Gibbs, 1999:13)

The approach as highlighted above emphasis the need for researchers to carry along members of the affected community. Firstly, by identifying their problems, work with them jointly and then guide them to jointly proffer solutions. This Dickson called “Aesthetic consideration to maximise communication in theatre for development.” (Gibbs, 1999:18) This he based on the fact that proffering solution to any identified problem is suppose to be a joint effort. This may not be far from the reason why Freire (1972) in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* cited in (Ewu, 1999:87) asserts that “development is not something that is given but evolves through the collective action and reflection of all members of the society.” In this direction we embrace Dickson’s procedure, using theatre to address communal problems as opposed to “ad hocism”- consumerist and capitalist ethics; in which there is always the necessity to differentiate between the “producer and the consumer, the have and the have-not” (Salhi, 1998:38).

We therefore suggest the pedagogy of Theatre for development that:

- Identify problems that affects a community;
 - Excite awareness by communicating with the people of the affected area;
 - Enlist the interest of the people after bringing the issue to their awareness;
1. Invite the affected people and engage them in a joint discussion on how the problem can be resolved;
 2. Harvest their suggestions and enlist their participation in the solution finding process; and
 3. Introduce them to play staging style and make them participants right from the evolution.

The reason for using play staging idiom is not far from the fact that it is only through the medium of drama that minds of the affected people can be subtly arrested and their willingness enlisted while they are also allowed to use their own creative instincts. The method will bring them closer to their own problems and encourage them to be part of solution finding process. This is achievable through daily rehearsals and post-mortem analysis session.

Having highlighted the operational mechanism of TFD; the pattern enumerated below highlights how it will be used to address the problem of climate change.

- ✚ Shock the people into an awareness of the problem of climate Change;
- ✚ Educate them about the cause and its effect, excite them into a cross-fertilisation of ideas process;
- ✚ Take them through the process of the dramatisation and train them and make them to be part the process spreading the news of how to resolve the problem.
- ✚ Mobilise the people to participate in joint action and make the event a ritualistic one.

Similar approach has been adopted to address issues of similar nature in very many communities in Africa. It was used in Samaru- Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria and Gboko, Benue State Nigeria (to address the problem of fertiliser supply to the farmers). It was also a mechanism used in Harare, Kenya, Tanzania, South-Africa, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and in many other African countries.

One will agree that the major problem confronting Africa and why it got entangled in the web of the crisis of climate change was because of her obsession for technological equipment, which she is completely ignorant of its implications. Therefore, employing theatre as an Alternative Medium for enlightenment and re-awakening the people, no doubt, will avert untoward consequences. This is because theatre promotes lots of interactions through establishment of open-ended dialogue, cross fertilisation of ideas; a 'mixture of old and new wine approach', which obviously will provide a quick avenue for instant feed-back on the issue being addressed.

Findings

We found out that climate change is a cantankerous phenomenon that when it occurs, will spare no one, a recent one being the earthquake and Tsunami in China. Therefore, combating it headlong should excite participation of all and sundry.

Douglas Macgregor (1906-1964), says human beings are inherently lazy, and work only when they are pushed. This work therefore finds that the crisis of climate change when occur leaves a more devastatingly blow on African because African embrace most of the western technological invention, which explains why our markets are haven for "Tokunbos" (imported used materials from overseas), nuclear weapons, which turn out to be the major catalysts aggravating the

occurrence of climate changes being witnessed in Africa. It is unfortunate that most of the used cars imported into Africa, some of them outmoded, have greatly increased our fuel consumption; fossil oil burning and increasing the Green House gases CO₂ that is emitted into our environment and also the current uprisings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is clear from the foregoing that theatre, using the Tfd approach is an alternative mechanism that will muster appeal, educate and sensitise people to reason. To effectively explore the potency of the mechanism, we (as in people and governmental and non-governmental organisations) need to on regular basis observe the following functional procedures, which the Tfd suggests:

- Government, Non-Governmental Organisations and Corporate bodies should start to; either jointly or individually to shows interest it the promotion of cultural mechanisms by establishing functional popular theatre outfits that its activities will be felt at both the urban and rural areas.
- Train the groups in the art of play making.
- Let government through its agencies periodically identify problems that are rearing up its head in our environment and use the theatre groups to arouse the awareness of the populace.
- Encourage the group to visit the stations periodically.
- Zone the players where there is the dearth of manpower.
- Provide them with information dissemination equipment; i.e. vehicles, public address systems and other theatrical equipment.
- Gradually integrate the community into the culture of being responsive to it environmental demands.

Notes

- 1 Lee, Arthur . 2010. "Addressing Climate Change" by Chevron's Principal Advisor on Climate Change.
- 2 Acheampong, Elvis Akwasi 2010. "Global Warming and Climate Change: Creating the Grass-root awareness. An article written on 18th September, 2010.by the President Green Ghana,
- 3 Shah, Anup. 2010. "Climate Change and Global Warming Introduction." <http://www.globalissues.org/article/233/climate-change-and-global-warming-introduction>

- 4 Kartha, Deepa. 2010. "What is Culture" downloaded from <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/what-is-culture.html>
- 5 World Bank Report on Climate Change downloaded from [www.worldbank.org/ climate change](http://www.worldbank.org/climatechange).
- 6 Britannica. <http://www.com Britannica /EBchecked/topic/473717/pragmatism>

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